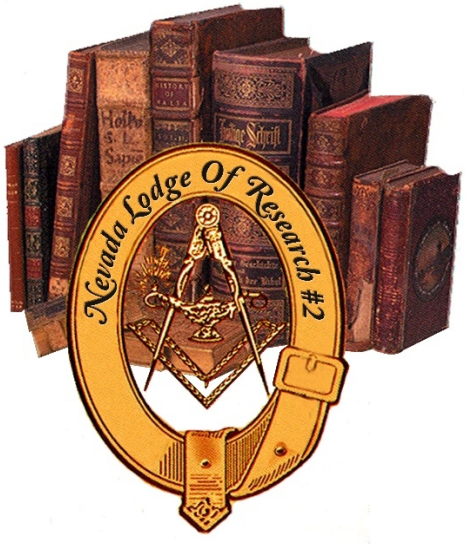

FAMOUS FREE-MASONS OF NEVADA

Brother Francis J. Bell

(1840 – 1927)

SEPTEMBER 9, 6025
NEVADA LODGE OF RESEARCH #2
Antony R.B. Augay P.∴M.∴

Introduction

The life story of Francis Jardine Bell, known as “Frank Bell” is completely intertwined with the story of the Battle Born state of Nevada, forged during the American Civil War (1861-1865). This time period was a time of massive transformation for the American west coast. Francis Jardine "Frank" Bell, is a perfect encapsulation of that time period of new frontier, demographic transformation and technological revolution. As a North American British immigrant (Upper Canada), Frank Bell quickly became a primordial figure in the development of the State of Nevada, Bell left the cold valleys of his northern east coast territory to be part of this new west frontier, that did not even have a set name at the time, sometime called “Washoe” or “Alta California”[1] before becoming “Nevada Territory”[2] in 1861 and Nevada state in 1864. Everything had to be built.

(Figure 1)

Bell was at various times a telegraph pioneer, known to have participated in sending the longest ever telegram; the entire constitution of the state of Nevada to the Federal Government that help creating the state, he was a state prison warden, a well-liked public servant that was able to climb the ranks to Governor of the newly created State of Nevada in a most unusual way, through a series of unexpected and unforeseen events, an avid student of new technologies, especially the telegraph and telephone, having brought the first telephone line to Reno, he served Reno his whole life, with his last office being Reno’s Justice of Peace.

Bell was not only a liked prominent public figure, he was also a highly respected and active Free-Mason, in both his blue Lodge Reno number 13, his Royal Chapter, and the Grand Lodge, he had a specific vision for Free-Masonry in Nevada.

Early Life (1840-1864)

Francis Jardine Bell was born on January 28, 1840 from Scotch parents, in Toronto, Upper Canada still a province of a British colony, the Canadian Confederation would not happen for another 27 years. He came from a modest household and such was his education limited to the common schools of his native province, meaning that his education was mainly focused on practical foundations and mathematics rather than the classical studies that were common among the era's elite[3]. Given that his family life was disrupted around the age of eight, it is probable that his schooling ended at that point. However, in this era of new frontier, this very practical education would prove extremely useful to Bell.

(Figure 2)

The defining event of Bell's childhood occurred around 1848. His family had moved from Toronto to Michigan, a common migration path at the time for those seeking economic opportunity in the United States. It was there, at the age of eight, that he was orphaned. This event plunged him into a decade for which no direct records have been found—a "*lost decade*" that was undoubtedly the crucible of his character. This traumatic experience would shape his mind and instill a strong sense of independence at a very young age.

---

[1] History of Nevada Far Western frontier, by: Angel, Myron, ed. Publication date: 1881. p.29 — History of the State of Nevada.
[2] Stein, Mark (2008). How the States Got Their Shapes. Harper Collins. pp. 176–177.
[3] Reno Evening Gazette Newspaper Archives October 31, 1925 Page 1

Though his parents' names are lost to history, his own name provides clues to his lineage. His middle name, Jardine, is almost certainly a maternal surname, following a common 19th-century naming convention to preserve a mother's family line. This offers a critical starting point for any future genealogical investigation into his mother's family.

At the young age of 10 years old, Bell took interest in telegraphy and overall new communication technologies, a passion that he would harbor for the remaining for his life.

Bell made a life defining decision in 1859 at the age of 18 years old, three years before adulthood at that time, he decided to make the journey to a place that would become the Nevada Territory in 1861, not to mine the rich region, but to work for a company tasked with the monumental labor of stringing the transcontinental telegraph line through the hot, wild and unforgiving terrain of Nevada so that the already networked California could be linked with the east. In 1861 he became "*General Superintendent of Construction of telegraph*", a job that would take him across the entire new territory, for two years from 1856 to 1860, Bell worked and oversaw this symbolic and critical infrastructure project, this placed him at the center of the technological expansion in the West.

(Figure 3)

Virginia City, placed a historical marker in 1988, that credits him as the builder of the first telegraph lines across the Sierra Nevada mountains, connecting Placerville, California, to the early Nevada settlements of Genoa and Virginia City.

(Figure 4)

This feat of engineering was a massive technological achievement that would bring the rugged and wild west coast into the modern world, and would prove crucial to the creation of the State of Nevada, this position of General Superintendent helped Bell deepened his long passion for new technologies and especially the telegram. Interestingly he was a cousin to Alexander Graham Bell (1847-1922)[4], that would later patent the first telephone in 1876.[5]

After the completion of the network, he decided to also work as a telegraph operator and mastered the trade, over the networks that he had helped build, he continued working as a superintendent for the Western Union Telegraph Company[6] for many years.

In October of 1864, the then 24 year old Bell, well known as an expert telegraph operator, was requested to take part in a gargantuan task as the civil war was raging and with the impending re-election of President Abraham Lincoln, it became crucial for the Republican administration of the time to gather as many votes as possible to pass the 13th Amendment of the constitution that would abolish slavery in the United States, amendment that had previously failed to pass the House of Representatives with the required two-thirds majority[7]. Nevada, a non-slave territory, was thus rushed for statehood which would bring, in theory three new Electoral Votes for the President and Three Congressional Votes for the 13th Amendment, (in reality only two of the three made it because of a snow storm presidential election only)[8], moreover, the raging Civil War was incredibly expensive, and the Union was in constant need of funds to

[4] Alexander Graham Bell : scientist and inventor by Schuman, Michael, 2015
[5] The story of Alexander Graham Bell, inventor of the telephone by Davidson, Margaret, 1936
[6] Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives June 15, 1872 Page 3
[7] Elliott, Russell R, and William D. Rowley. History of Nevada. 2nd ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987.

pay for soldiers, supplies, and munitions. The 1859 discovery of the Comstock Lode[9] in the Nevada Territory (*then part of western Utah Territory*) uncovered one of the richest silver and gold deposits in history which contributed to the accelerated admission of the State into the Union, even overlooking the population requirements set at 60,000 when “Nevada” only had 40,000.

A constitutional convention was then set in the territory of Nevada tasked with producing the first legal state document to satisfy the requirements to achieve statehood. The commission worked tirelessly to produce this massive legal document, but time was of the essence and it soon became evident that the document would not be ready in time to be sent as a hard copy by land before election. After consulting legal experts, Nevada territorial officials decided to accomplish a never seen before technological feat, send the complete state constitution – over 16,543 words in total entirely by telegraph.

This decision was met with shock and heavy criticism, a document of this size had never been transmitted before, any mistakes could have invalidate the document and the cost of sending such a lengthy telegram would be great. The commission approved a budget and handpicked a team of the best telegraph operators of the region. Making mistakes was not an option, Frank Bell was selected as one of these operator that would be tasked with transmitting the massive document. It would take two full days of non-stop telegraphing to transmit the document. Thanks in part to the massive work of Bell, the constitution of Nevada was received without a single mistake and in time. This was also the single most expensive telegram, at $4,303.27 (≈$88,555.20 in 2025) paid by the Nevada Territory. After Nevada was successfully admitted into the Union, Congress appropriated a sum of $3,416.77 (≈$70,296.26 in 2025) to reimburse the new state for the out-of-state portion of the cost. The constitution was received and President Lincoln proclaimed Nevada the 36th state on October 31, 1864.

The population of the new state, especially in Reno, Virginia City and Carson City, was well aware of Bell’s feat, helping create the Nevada telegraphic network infrastructure, modernizing the state and being a crucial part of it’s acceptance as a new State of the Union. This greatly helped shape his image as as an important figure of the then new state.

Building a Life in Reno: Family, Business, and Community (1865-1882)

After helping secure the Statehood of Nevada, Bell settled and transitioned from a pioneer of the new frontier to a stable and respected member of the nascent community of Reno, were he purchased a home on 110 North Sierra St, between 1st and 2nd.[10]

(Figure 5)

This choice of settling in Reno, was far from arbitrary; it was deeply connected to a monumental event that shook the entire region: the discovery of the Comstock Lode[11]. The history of Nevada is, to a great extent, the history of the Comstock Lode. This massive deposit of silver and gold, discovered in 1859, was the engine of the region's growth, triggering a huge influx of prospectors, entrepreneurs, and capital. This boom created not only the wealth that helped the Union finance the Civil War but also the

[8] Bowers, Michael W. The Sagebrush State: Nevada's History, Government, and Politics. 4th ed. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2013.
[9] Paher, Stanley W. Nevada Ghost Towns & Mining Camps. Las Vegas: Nevada Publications, 1970.
[10] Daily Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives July 11, 1896 Page 4
[11] History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming, 1540-1888 by Bancroft, Hubert Howe. Publication date 1890 p. 92-120 — Chapter V. The Comstock Lode.

population and infrastructure that justified statehood.[12] Bell promptly invested money in the Comstock mines[13]. But did not decide to settle in the then very rich Virginia City.

While chaotic mining camps like Virginia City and Gold Hill sprang up directly on the lode, they were primarily rugged centers of extraction, and became extremely wealthy town, so much Silver was being unearthed that its value plummeted to a point where people began to believe that silver would soon rank among the base metals[14]. Reno, by contrast, offered a different promise. Situated strategically in the Truckee Valley at the base of the Sierra Nevada, it was perfectly positioned to become a vital hub for transportation, commerce, and supplies. The immense cost of hauling machinery and goods from California over the mountains to the mines made a stable supply town like Reno indispensable. It is important to keep in mind that Reno was a small town under 1000 inhabitants when Frank Bell moved in.

(Figure 6)

For a man like Bell, whose expertise was in technology, communication, and infrastructure rather than mining, Reno represented a bright untapped future. It was a place where a permanent and modern community was rapidly forming, with lasting and stable social structures like the prestigious Reno Masonic Lodge No. 13, chartered in 1869[15] that would become known as the "*Lodge of Leadership.".*[16] Bell would be invited to join this Lodge in 1870, and civically engaged families like the Poores, into which he would marry. By choosing to build his life in Reno, Bell was positioning himself not at the turbulent heart of the mineral extraction, but at the foundational center of the new civilization the Comstock Lode was creating.

On July 9th, 1872 Bell married Mary Poore in Reno, this union connected him to a prominent and civically engaged pioneer family. Mary, born in Maine in 1849, came from a wealthy and well-educated background; she and her sisters attended the prestigious Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts. Her family, whose name was also spelled "*Poor,*" had a long history in America and was involved in milling and prospecting after moving west, first to California and then in different Nevada locations to end up in in Reno around 1869.

Mary Poore Bell was a notable figure in her own right. Along with her sisters, she was part of the founding members the Reno Congregational Church in 1871, she was also known for her musical talents and active participation in many charitable and civic affairs. This marriage connected Frank Bell to the local social elite, were he created many lasting connections which helped him become a Free-Mason. Together, Frank and Mary had at least three children, a first daughter Agnes, a second daughter, Fernald (known as "Mamie'), a son, Frank who would tragically succumb at an early age in 1879.

Bell's engagement and work in technology is visible throughout many new paper articles as an example an 1872 article states;

---

[12] The silver state : Nevada's heritage reinterpreted by Hulse, James W Publication date 1991 p. 67 — The Discovery of the Comstock Lode.
[13] The Nevada AdventureA History. By James W. Hulse. Publication date:1972. p.166
[14] History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming, 1540-1888 by Bancroft, Hubert Howe. Publication date 1890 – Preface.
[15]
[16] https://web.archive.org/web/20060103065454/http://reno13.org/

> **“Telegraphic Repairs. — Frank Bell,** Assistant Superintendent of the Western Union Telegraph Company on the Pacific Coast, has started out a posse of men to repair the wires between this place and Ogden, after finishing that job they will return here and work on the line running south, putting it also in complete working order. It is expected it will take six months to complete the work.[17]”

Another one from 1875;

> **“New Poles.— Frank Bell** is preparing to put in new telegraph poles in the vicinity of Reno, as the old ones are found decaying. The Western Union generally keep things in a first-class condition.[18]”

Bell is also credited to be the first to demonstrate the first telephone in the state of Nevada, showcasing this revolutionary invention from his distant cousin Alexander Graham Bell to the Silver State. Bell did not just showcase it for public display, he actively adopted it, developed it, made use of it and set up the very first private telephone line in Reno and Nevada, connecting his residence at 110 N. Sierra Street to the home of his brother-in-law a known regional politician, Christopher Columbus Powning (1852–1898). This act alone enabled his wife, Mary, to be the first women to have telephone service in her home in the entire city, placing the Bell family at the cutting edge of technology.

Bell was careful in building his network and creating a useful entourage, he had a consistent pattern of actively building and participating in the core networks of a rapidly modernizing society. His marriage enabled him to be part of an established family, his wife gave him access to the spiritual community connecting him to the moral and social nervous center of the city and his showcasing of the telephone cemented him not as a simple resident of Reno but as an active builder and shaper of this growing town.

His public perception of the time, as demonstrated by the many articles written about him in local new papers, was of a good, moral, active and forward think individual which naturally conducted him to a career in the public service although he did not actively campaigned towards this goal.

His work for the Western Union Telegraph Company, brought him all over the state of Nevada, many of his voyages would be carefully recorded into the Reno news papers of the day, and helped Bell be recognized throughout the State as a bringer of technological advancement, (installing telegraphic services), this helped improve his knowledge of the new state and his image statewide.

Reno’s First (and Only) Public Execution (Feb. 19, 1878)

Before Frank Bell became known for his formal administrative roles as Warden and Governor, his reputation for integrity and sound judgment was publicly tested in one of early Reno's most dramatic and somber events. In 1878, he, along with Reno's other leading citizens, was called upon to participate in the final legal proceedings for the convicted murderer J.W. Rover. This affair, which culminated in Washoe County's first and only public execution, was not an event Bell merely witnessed; it was one in which he was an official participant, a duty that foreshadowed the grave responsibilities of his future career.

[17] Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives June 15, 1872 p.3
[18] Weekly Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives December 11, 1875 Page 3

The case itself had gripped the region for three years. It involved the gruesome 1875 murder and dismemberment of I.N. Sharp near the Rabbithole sulphur mines. After a protracted legal odyssey that saw two convictions in Humboldt County overturned by the Supreme Court, the trial was moved to Washoe County. Rover was finally convicted in Reno and sentenced to be hanged on February 19, 1878.[19]

On the very eve of the scheduled execution, Rover's attorneys made a final, desperate plea, invoking a rarely used statute that required a "sheriff's jury" to be convened to rule on their client's sanity. This was a solemn, last-minute duty, and for it, the authorities required a "blue-ribbon jury" composed of the town's most prominent and trusted men.

Frank Bell's selection for this panel speaks volumes about the respect he commanded in Reno. He was not yet a state official, but he was already regarded as a man of integrity and sound judgment, fit to decide a matter of life and death. He served alongside other civic leaders like J.C. Lewis, H.H. Beck, and William Duck, a group representing the core of Reno's business and social establishment.

The task facing Bell and his fellow jurors was immense. While a crowd of 200 invited spectators gathered and a gallows was constructed in the courthouse yard, the twelve men deliberated inside for four hours over the condemned man's mental state. The proceedings were fraught with tension, and ultimately, the jury could not reach the required unanimous verdict. They deadlocked with a vote of seven believing Rover sane and five unsure. With no legal reason to grant a reprieve, the jury was dismissed, and the final path to the execution was cleared.[20]

For Bell, the forward-thinking technologist and community builder, this experience was a stark immersion in the gravest aspects of civil society. His role was a profound demonstration of the public trust he already commanded. It was a clear sign that his contributions to building a new civilization on the frontier went beyond stringing telegraph wires; they included confronting the harshest questions of law and order. This solemn duty served as a direct prelude to the formal administrative responsibilities he would soon be asked to undertake at the local and state level.

A year before in 1877 Bell was elected head of the County Central Committee of the Republican party, in order to fill the vacancy of Mr. S. M. Jamison that had resigned[21] he was also selected to serve in the "Fire Police" of Reno by the board of Fire Commissioners.[22]

The year of 1879 was a difficult one for the Bell family, on the month of October, his three children fell gravely ill with scarlet fever, Agnes, the oldest was noted as "very sick" while the second daughter, Fernal, was not as affected, Frank Jr. was the most impacted, on October 19th he almost lost his life seven different times during the same day[23]. While the two daughters recovered, Frank Jr. died on October 29, 1879 at only one year old.

By July 1882 Bell shifted from his telegraphic efforts and decided to completely devote his time to the development and construction of telephone lines in Nevada.[24]

---

[19] https://www.rgj.com/story/news/2025/02/15/jw-rover-reno-execution-washoe-county-courthouse-1878/78345061007/
[20] https://www.executedtoday.com/2014/02/19/1878-j-w-rover-sulfur/
[21] Weekly Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives August 18, 1877 Page 1
[22] Daily Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives March 8, 1877 Page 2
[23] Daily Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives October 19, 1879 Page 2
[24] Daily Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives July 27, 1882 Page 3

Some smaller local news events can also offer a glimpse into Bell's personality as an upstanding citizen of Reno, the Weekly Reno Gazette writes this small article in 1880 demonstrating the daily life of this small town and Bell's involvement;

> **"A Basket Thief**
> Between 12 and 1 o'clock Saturday Coroner Jones was walking down Virginia street and observed a man making off from Knust & Jones' store with a number of baskets. The basket fancier was walking at such a rapid rate that his movements excited the suspicion of Mr. Jones. The man with the baskets turned the first corner, when Mr. Jones called to **Frank Bell**, who opportunely hove in sight, to stop him. Mr. Bell did so, and when they took the fellow back to the store it was found that he had stolen the willow-ware. He gave his name in the Justice's court as Henry Jones, pleaded guilty and was committed to jail for thirty days. Henry occupied a prison cell within thirty minutes from the time that he committed the theft. Speedy justice, that.[25]"

Bell was not just a liked public figure and a known technological enthusiast, he was also a savvy investor, placing stocks in multiple mining operations around Nevada, one article from 1884 mentions Bell "*having made a killing*" on a new stock of Mining shares from the Bodie district.[26]

The Public Servant: A Career in State Governance (1883-1909)

Frank Bell's extensive career in public service was not characterized by electoral ambition but by a willingness to assume important roles of administrative responsibility, often received through his extensive network of connections or by circumstances. His political trajectory was very unusual for the time, marked by a steady and publicly perceived competence that turned him into a known trusted figure, to a point when even state leaders would ask him for advice in times of need. He exemplified a model of the public trustee, valued for his stability and administrative skill in a rapidly developing state.

Warden of the Nevada State Prison, First Term (1883-1887)

A crucial announce relayed in the Nevada State Journal in 1883 made by the *Austin Reveille Journal*, perfectly describes the public view of Frank Bell at the time, this article describes *"... Frank Bell, of Reno..."* as "*… the most fitted for the place… honest, upright, and of A-1 executive ability … needless for us to sound his praises to the people of Nevada…"* and concludes with "*...The Legislature should study the public good in the appointment of this responsible officer.*" The journal continues with an official endorsement stating;

> "The *Reveille* is evidently deeply interested in its cause and candidate. *The Journal* takes pleasure in fully endorsing all that it has said, and in its opinion there is not a man in the State of Nevada who would make a better Warden than Frank Bell. He is as honest as the day is long; he is not addicted to the use of intoxicating liquors, so that his head is always clear; he does not gamble, therefore it is impossible for him to ever be short in his accounts.
>
> Above all, he is a man of extraordinary ability. For twenty years he was superintendent of the Nevada division of the Western Union Telegraph Company. The experience gained by such service has made him a close calculator, and it is certain that under his management the State

[25] Weekly Reno Gazette Newspaper Archives March 18, 1880 Page 4
[26] Weekly Reno Gazette Newspaper Archives January 10, 1884 Page 4

> Prison would be managed honestly and economically, and *The Journal* believes that the people would get the full benefit of every dollar the care and maintenance of the prisoners would cost them. There is not a man in the State more peculiarly fitted for the position of Warden than Mr. Bell.[27] ”

Thus Bell was selected by the Republicans of the legislature and voted as the nominee for Warden, the vote stood as Bell 19, Gibson 14, Lyon 4 – Making it a close vote, noted as “competitive but cordial”, and began his journey into the public life with one of the most difficult administrative position, Warden of the Nevada State Prison. He was appointed in 1883 and held this position for 4 years, this position demanded a high degree of public trust, a strong managerial acumen, personal integrity and a lot of difficult work.

Bell recorded the two year maintenance outlay at $80,803.59 ($2,584,107.82 in 2025.) and requested that $85,000.00 ($2,718,799.03 in 2025.) be appropriated for the next term.

He carried out many projects during his term as Warden, such as cleaning the entire State reservoir, He laid 1,941 sq. ft. of stone flagging; built new stone perimeter walls (west yard: 27 ft long × 16 ft 4 in high × 30 in. thick; east yard: 162 ft × 10 ft × 30 in.); added 420.5 ft of 5-inch coping; concreted large portions of the yard; retinned and painted roofs but also rebuilt the kitchen/laundry range, installed new boiler-plate ovens and a heater, renewed the wooden sewers and cultivated two acres of land that were able to supply nearly all vegetables for a period of eight months. He also prepared and stored ice each years. He then noted that the health of inmates financial and state property was “*in good repair.*”

Bell also thwarted an attempt to arson the Shoe making shop, he found and punished the culprits, reported three escapes that were all recaptured very quickly. The number of prisoners in 1883 was 113, this number peaked at 125 in 1884 and returned to 115 in 1884. Every Sunday, a religious service was held, four men died during his term. Bell had an extra cell built bringing the total number of cells to 57 with three men per cells.

He found a way to create an exotic source of revenue to the prison, after the discovery of pre-historic sloth tracks brought both scientists and visitors, over 5779 during a period of two years, Bell then turned over the newly found fossils over to the State Curator. The money generated during these two years served building a prison library and pay the chaplain fee.

He also tighten the budget of the state-owned boot & shoe factory. From a $50,000 (≈ $1,599,247.52 in 2025) appropriation he spent $44,236.03 (≈ $1,414,756.96 in 2025), manufactured $47,886.35 in goods, sold $45,287.29, paid $43,225.29 into the Treasury, all of this while the region was going though an economic downturn, he was able to report a $2,652.48 (≈ $84,821.57 in 2025) profit after raising prices around 7% and trimming the monthly expenses by $75 (≈ $2,398.88 in 2025); he recommended a $50,000 appropriation for the next term, noted as “an excellent financial management even in an economic downturn.”

These four years proved successful for Bell and demonstrated that he was in capacity to handle highly demanding administrative tasks on a state level this proved his capacity to work outside of the private sector.

---

[27] Weekly Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives January 13, 1883 Page 1

Although Frank Bell was active in his republican party and a well liked member of the community, it seems that he applied his Masonic teaching and overall moral qualities with diligence and would not participate in any back door political arrangements, an 1884 article from the Weekly Reno Gazette, praises Bell for his outstanding work and complains of the "removal of a good man" from as superintendent of Asylum for "political reasons" and fears that the same might happen to Bell, no matter how excellent his term may be.

> "… I am glad to know of the excellent record Mr. Bell is making, although anyone acquainted with his past life and habits would know that it could not be otherwise. I should like to see Frank retained, but when I look at the disgraceful jobbery in the superintendency of your insane asylum, and the removal of a good man for no cause except political reasons —and hardly those—I fear that no matter how good Frank's record, or how good the man, political reasons even in his own party will cause his removal, if it is found expedient by the "bosses," just as quickly as if there were no such record."[28]

This 1884 prediction was correct, and Bell after an impeccable record, was not re-appointed (until later in his career). Frank Bell remained active in the Republican Party and was appointed as proxy for Fulton to the Chicago Republican Convention.[29] this was not his first time attending the Republican convention and was noted as having done well in the previous one.[30]

Ironically, this non-reappointment as Warden of the Nevada State Prison, enabled Bell to be later appointed as Lt. Governor to then become Governor of Nevada.

Bell had to leave his hometown of Reno for Carson city, in 1884. Frank Bell's house in Reno is listed as "For Rent", by then the Bell family was definitely integrated into the upper echelons or elites of society, on one instance Frank Bell's wife, Mary (Poor) Bell (commonly called Mrs. Frank Bell), is described attending a Fifth Anniversary (Wooden Wedding) on April 1884, described as; "The most elegant private entertainment ever given in Reno…". Mrs Bell is described attending with her husband offering a "Plush-covered jewel case and celluloid toilet set" as a gift to the couple, Mrs Bell's attire is described as "… dress of heavy cinnamon-brown silk, with vest and skirt border of maroon-colored velvet; ornaments, coral and diamonds."[31]

On February 18th 1887 Bell, his wife and two daughters are recorded to have returned to their Reno home after four years in Carson.[32]

---

[28] Weekly Reno Gazette Newspaper Archives February 7, 1884 Page 1
[29] Weekly Reno Gazette Newspaper Archives March 27, 1884 Page 2
[30] Weekly Reno Gazette Newspaper Archives March 20, 1884 Page 1
[31] Weekly Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives April 19, 1884 Page 3
[32] Weekly Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives February 19, 1887 Page 4

The "Accidental" Governor (1889-1891)

His ascension to Nevada's highest office was most unusual and had never been seen before, this earned him the nickname of *"accidental governor"* although more complex than a simple accident. Bell was was never elected as lieutenant governor, nor as governor. Instead, he ascended through a rapid and unforeseen series of vacancies. This all began in 1889 when Lieutenant Governor H. C. Davis died, then Governor Charles C. Stevenson quickly appointed Samuel W. Chubbuck to the position but he resigned only two months after taking office on November 30, 1889.

The same day Governor Stevenson turned to Frank Bell, after his acceptance, Bell was appointed as the eighth Lieutenant Governor of the state of Nevada, a promotion that skyrocketed him directly into the state's executive branch. Less than a year after obtaining this prestigious position another turn of event would alter Bell's path when Governor Stevenson fell gravely ill with typhoid in September 1890 and had to travel to San Francisco for medical care. Stevenson realized that he could not continue to assume his office and officially signed a disability certificate on September 1, 1890 which immediately proclaimed Lieutenant Governor Bell the Acting Governor of Nevada until Stevenson could resume his role. Unfortunately for Stevenson, the treatments proved unsuccessful and he died twenty days later, on September 21, 1890. This changed Bell's status from acting to official, he assumed the full duties of the governorship and became the sixth governor of Nevada but his tenure was short-lived, lasting 106 days until the inauguration of the next duly elected governor, Roswell K. Colcord, on January 5, 1891.

However, he also introduced his own initiatives, including the promotion of social policies. Historical accounts indicate he supported (not enacted laws during Bell's brief term);

> "the outlawing of the sale of liquor in the Capital during legislative sessions, and the establishment of a State Board of Health".

We can deduct that Bell harbored an opposition to the consumption of alcohol which was very popular at that time, this is corroborated with the 7th Masonic Edict that he took as a Grand Master of Masons;

> "Habitual intemperance is a Masonic offense."

These actions further demonstrate his active engagement with governance despite his limited time in office.

In his 1891, 21 page address[33], Bell offers a window into his governing philosophy, his message opens with acknowledging the "*peculiar and melancholy circumstances*" of his address and praises his incoming successor.

Bell then addresses many aspect of his governance, two points stand out as examples; first he strongly transmitted the Supreme court's formal point of view that the justices sitting as the state board of canvasser[34] did not possess the power or authority to canvass or cure defective returns on the separate questions of calling a constitutional convention, their canvassing authority was found to only extend to the specific offices not the questions on the ballot.

---

[33] Appendix to journals of Senate And Assembly of the fifteenth of the Session legislature Of The State Of Nevada, Carson, Publication date:1891

[34] A state board of canvassers is a body of state officials responsible for reviewing and certifying statewide election results to make them official.

Several county abstracts were "uncertain," "defective," or unauthenticated, with no judicial power to compel corrections. Rather than add an extra layer of legal fix, Bell decided to turn to the proper forum: noting that the convention question "*was carried by a majority of all the votes cast,*" he stated that it would "*become your duty to devise some means whereby the wishes of the people may be respected.*"

In short, Bell was able to preserve a clear separation of powers, thereby protecting the judicial limits, rooting the political question to the Legislature, and making sure that the decision of the voters would be implemented in a just and lawful procedure.[35]

This small governorship was not without consequences, it became a landmark of Nevada politics, Bell, born in Toronto, Canada was the first foreign-born governor in Nevada and his unconventional path from humble immigrant to warden to governor sent a message of possibilities to many immigrant of the newly formed state and demonstrated his ability to be a safe pair of hands, a figure of stability who could be relied upon to manage the state during a period of unexpected transition.

A Steady Hand: Policies and Priorities

Bell was seen as a steady and stable official during his brief administration, he diligently continued to carry out the programs and policies of the Stevenson administration serving as a safe and stable transition to the next election. He did not seek a full term as governor, reinforcing the impression that he viewed his service as a matter of duty rather than a stepping stone for further political ambition. At the time there was no provision in Nevada law to remunerate an acting governor, the Nevada Legislature thus further recognized him with the February 21, 1891 act authorizing a payment of $1,111.21 (≈ $39,444.60 in 2025) for his salary during his time as acting governor.

Warden and Justice of the Peace (1893-1895)

Bell left office on January 1891, after this tumultuous moment in his life he resumed his work in the telephone and telegraph, a passion that never left him but he remained a well recognized, respected and liked public figure in the community his reputation for administrative competence led to his reappointment as Warden of the Nevada State Prison from 1893 to 1895 which he fulfilled with the same competence as the first term.

During this second term, a specific administrative decision he made was documented. According to an historical report on the prison, the shop that he was able to turn profitable during his first term was again in deficit and had to be closed;

> "When Warden Frank Bell assumed the wardenship in 1893, he closed the shoemaking shop, unable to justify its continued deficit".

This specific action demonstrated his style of management and focus on fiscal responsibility to the population of Reno and Nevada in general.

[35] Appendix to journals of Senate And Assembly of the fifteenth of the Session legislature Of The State Of Nevada, Carson, Publication date:1891 1-20

Bell did not stop serving Reno and returned to the public life about a decade after his appointment as Warden, this time at a local Judge level, from 1905 to 1909 he served as Justice of the Peace, (a public officer who presides as Judge over minor court cases) in Reno. He also remained active in with his technological passion, an article[36] from 1921's Pacific Telephone Magazine, mentions him attending a banquet at the Golden Hotel in Reno, organized by the Reno Bell Club as a Guest of Honor, where he is mentioned as ex-Governor, Judge and cousin of Alexander Graham Bell (inventor of the telephone), he apparently gave a very interesting lecture on the evolution of the telephone and his own experiences with it, he would have been 81 years old.

Bell's Masonic and Fraternal Career

Free-Masonry arrived in the far west with waves of prospectors and settlers who after a long journey arrived looking for fortune in the gold and silver mines in a rough and wild land. These early Masons were known as pillar of the community and would be among the elites of the communities in which the Lodge was located. Initially, these lodges operated under charters granted by the Grand Lodge of California F∴& A∴M∴ which was the established Masonic authority in the entire region. Therefore when Bell first arrived in the region around 1856 the Grand Lodge of Nevada was not yet created.

As the population of the Nevada Territory grew, particularly after the discovery of a massive deposit of silver and gold discovered in 1859 in Nevada termed "*the Comstock Lode*"[37] [38], a large movement for Masonic independence began to stir. The great distances and administrative challenges of being governed from California highlighted a need for a local, sovereign governing body. This journey toward self-governance mirrored the territory's own path to statehood. The process culminated in a convention held in Virginia City, where on January 17, 1865, less than three months after Nevada became a state, the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Nevada was officially proclaimed.

These early Nevada Lodges were very selective and the rate of rejection was high even after investigation, as an example in 1869, Virginia Lodge number 3 (formerly 162), accepted 14 new Masons and rejected 18 (56.25 % rejected). Escural Lodge number 7 (formerly 170), accepted 8 and rejected 13 (61.90 % rejected), Reno Lodge 13 accepted 17 and rejected 8 (32.00 % rejected).

In 1877 Bell's home was burglarized, within the stolen items was a Masonic keystone[39] which is the only item that he offered a reward for its retrieval.

Although not much information is available, Frank Bell was also a member and Worshipful Master of the Nevada Lodge No.5 of the Ancient Order of United Workmen (A.O.U.W.), meeting every Tuesday night at the Masonic Hall. The A.O.U.W. was a then new fraternal benefit society founded in 1868 by Free-Mason John Jordan Upchurch, which is credited with pioneering the concept of providing life insurance to working-class men and their families. Heavily influenced by Masonic traditions, the order was composed of three degrees and operated under the core tenets of 'Charity, Hope, and Protection' to provide for the widows and orphans of its members, the order declined and dissolved in 1952.

---

[36] Pacific Telephone Magazine – Volume 15 – p.44 Publication Date: 1921.
[37] History of Nevada Far Western frontier, by: Angel, Myron, ed. Publication date: 1881. pp. 47, 52 — History of the State of Nevada.
[38] History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming, 1540-1888 by Bancroft, Hubert Howe. Publication date 1890 p. 92 — The Comstock Lode.
[39] Daily Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives January 9, 1877 Page 2

Reno Lodge No. 13, F∴ & A∴M∴

Reno Lodge No. 13 was organized on January 4, 1869, in the then around 1000 inhabitant's town of Reno[40], with James Z. Kelley as Worshipful Master, Barent Springfield as Senior Warden, and George Geisen as Junior Warden with a membership of thirty-four, it is not certain if Bell was made a member at that time[41] [42] or rather made a member the following year of 1870, it is also uncertain if he was already a Mason before joining Reno Lodge, or had been raised in the Lodge as there are no mentions of Reno Lodge 13 making him an Entered Apprentice or Fellow Craft by name in 1869 or 1870, however, it is highly probable that was was made a Mason there, as there are no trace of Frank Bell being made a Mason anywhere else and he had been living in Reno since 18, also the Lodge returns were only performed at the end of the year, for instance, if a candidate was Entered, Passed and Raised within the same year he would not be listed as Entered or Passed but just as a Member. For the year 1869 the Lodge reports 17 initiated, 16 Passed and 16 raised, 6 affiliated and 8 rejected with 34 members.[43] On the following year, where Bell is listed as a Member, the Lodge reported 8 initiated, 8 Passed and 7 raised, 13 affiliated and 1 rejected with 53 members. The Lodge first met in a frame building on Virginia Street near the river, then erected their own building, the Lodge issued bonds and they raise $20,000 ($475,070.59 in 2025) and moved to Alhambra Hall. In 1872 it was decided create a Masonic Temple at Commercial Row and Sierra Street.

(Figure 7)

The Lodge remained there until 1906, but the building itself was preserved and became the oldest standing commercial structure in Reno, until it was razed in 2019. In 1906, Bell was still an active member when Reno Lodge moved into the new Masonic Temple on Virginia Street, opposite its original location. The Temple, built by a corporation at a cost of $120,000, ($4,307,306.40 in 2025) was a classic Beaux Arts composition with a rigorously symmetrical facade divided into a rusticated base a grand "piano nobile," and an attic/parapet with Giant classical orders columns, heavy entablatures a bold cornice, and sculptural parapet ends with scrolls/urn finials add to the formal, civic look. The round-arched window groupings and brick-and-stone palette leaned into a Renaissance Revival style.

This new Masonic Temple, was a state-of-the art Masonic edifice, showcasing a blend of beauty, strength and a robust design that made it highly functional for Masonic work, it was well equipped for Masonic work with multiple rooms for different purposes and with a main blue Lodge room used for Grand Lodge meetings and as a Reno 13 home Lodge. Reno Lodge owned a little over one-quarter of the capital stock; the remainder is held by other Masonic bodies and members. The Lodge's longest-serving officer was Thomas K. Hymers, Treasurer for thirty-three years. S. L. Jamison served twenty-three years as Secretary, and Henry L. Fish served six years as Master.[44]

(Figure 8)

(Figure 9)

---

[40] 1870 United States census. Publication date 1870 p.196 — Population of Civil Division Less than Counties.
[41] Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Nevada Fifth Grand Communication. Publication Date: 1869 p.529 — Reno Lodge, No. 13.
[42] History of Nevada Far Western frontier, by: Angel, Myron, ed. Publication date: 1881. pp. 47, 52 — History of the State of Nevada.
[43]
[44] The history of Nevada by Davis, Sam P. (Sam Post), 1850-1918 Volume 2 Publication date: 1913 p. 677 — Fraternal Societies – Reno Lodge 13.

As previously mentioned, in the year 1869-1870 Frank Bell was made a Master Mason in the prestigious Reno Lodge number 13, the fact that Frank Bell was admitted into this then highly prestigious and rather elite group, demonstrate his ability to climb social rank and the strength of his character. Bell was a highly active member of his Lodge, and was invited to join the line of officers, interestingly he was elected as Senior Warden in 1881[45] then left the corp of officers and was voted directly as Worshipful Master of his Lodge in 1888[46] [47].

The Royal Arch Reno Chapter, No 7 and Grand Chapter

On March 1st 1875, the Grand High Priest of Nevada granted a dispensation for the creation of Reno Chapter No 7 for the Royal Arch of which Frank Bell was one of the chartering members and was chosen to hold the highest position of High Priest for this chapter.[48]

After being High Priest, Bell was nominated into the Grand Chapter of Nevada, his ascension was rapid, in 1876 he was Grand Captain of the Host, in 1877 Grand Scribe, 1878 Grand King, 1879 Deputy Grand High Priest and he was elected as Grand High Priest for the state of Nevada in 1880.[49]

In the 1905 Proceedings of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of the State of Nevada, Bell is still noted as Past Grand High Priest for the state of Nevada among 14 Past Grand High Priests as well as active Royal Arch Mason of his Reno Chapter, No. 7 among 91 members.[50]

The Grand Lodge

The Grand Lodge of Nevada, issued an official resolution to thank the people of Reno on December 25th 1875, Frank Bell was then acting secretary. (pro tem).[51]

More than a decade later in 1889 Bell was elected right away as a Junior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of the State of Nevada, he then became Senior Grand Warden in 1890. At the Grand Lodge communication on June 9th 1891 in Reno, he was bestowed with the supreme honor of being elected Grand Master of Masons of Nevada[52], following John W. Eckley[53], an honor bestowed upon him while he was concurrently serving as Governor of the state.[54]

---

[45] Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Nevada Twenty-seventh Grand Communication. Publication Date: 1881 p.459 — Reno Lodge, No. 13.
[46] Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Nevada Twenty-seventh Grand Communication. Publication Date: 1888 p.413 — Reno Lodge, No. 13.
[47]Reno Lodge Number Thirteen F∴ & A∴M∴ 100th — Anniversary Publication Date: 1969 p.34.
[48] History of Nevada Far Western frontier, by: Angel, Myron, ed. Publication date: 1881. p. 246 — founding officers of Reno Chapter No. 7 (Royal Arch).
[49] History of Nevada Far Western frontier, by: Angel, Myron, ed. Publication date: 1881. p. 248 — founding officers of Reno Chapter No. 7 (Royal Arch).
[50] Proceedings Of The M∴ E∴ Grand Royal Arch Chapter Of The State Of Nevada — Thirty-Second Annual Grand Convocation, Masonic Hall, Carson City Publication date: June 12, A∴D∴ 1905 • A∴I∴ 2435 pp. 74-75
[51] Nevada State Journal Newspaper Archives December 25, 1873 Page 3
[52] Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Nevada Twenty-eight Grand Communication. Publication Date: 1889
[53] The history of Nevada by Davis, Sam P. (Sam Post), 1850-1918 Volume 2 Publication date: 1913 p. 680 — Grand Lodge (Blue Lodge) table of annual sessions & Grand Masters.
[54] The history of Nevada by Davis, Sam P. (Sam Post), 1850-1918 Volume 2 Publication date: 1913 p. 680 — Grand Lodge (Blue Lodge) table of annual sessions & Grand Masters.

His term as a Grand Master was marked with the same efficiency and hard work that he demonstrated as a Governor, as evidenced by the number of decisions issued during his term[55] [56] compared to his predecessors and successor. Bell issued 12 different decisions (See Appendix 1) in stark contract with his successor John H. Hubbs[57] (who died only over a month of being elected Grand Master and was replaced by his deputy Grand Master; W. John E. Jones)[58] together they only issued tow edicts.[59] and his predecessor John W. Eckley who only issued one.

At the end of his year as a Most Worshipful Master of the state of Nevada, Bell delivered a moving address to the Grand Lodge on June 14th, 1892, it was a short, efficient and balanced message that gives a glimpse of his personality, unsurprisingly he mentions using the telegraph on multiple occasions and addresses many issues that the Grand Lodge faced at that time. (Appendix 1). Interestingly, Bell mentioned the Cerneau degrees causing division within free-masonry; the Cerneau Rite was a variant of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite that was gaining popularity at the time and caused disunity. Frank Bell warns against this rite and the division that it had created especially in Ohio were three Lodges had seceded in an attempt to for their own "*Grand Lodge of Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite*". Bell warned;

> "[...]This difficulty has arisen from the introduction of Cerneau Scottish Rite degrees, which seem to be productive of discord, disturbing the peace and harmony of the Craft in a number of Jurisdictions."

Bell also addresses the different ritual styles practiced in Nevada and with respect and possible difficulties, he mentions that no two Lodges in Nevada practice the same ritual, calling for a better uniformity of the different works practiced without losing their differences, he mentions an *Old* and a *New* "Nevada works", he then proposes a solution offered as a help with a profound knowledge of the history of Free-Masonry and an understanding of financial situation, he explains that the Grand Lodge is not in a financial position to hire grand lecturers to roam the State and showcase the Grand Lodge work, instead he offers to emulate what the United Grand Lodge of England had done back in 1813. England had (and still has) 100's of different rituals (works) practiced within its jurisdiction and no official work, as a help to Lodges, they created the *rite of Emulation* which was to be performed once per year at the Grand Lodge to showcase the new ritual to all Lodges. Bell proposed that the Grand Lodge of Nevada showcases all three degrees once per year for all Lodges to see, probably using Carson Lodge Work often seen as the oldest Nevada work. Bell says:

> "No doubt this is imperatively necessary, as it is no exaggeration to say that no two Lodges have the same ritual"

It is important to note that Nevada did not have a fixed ritual at this time, and that it was normal practice for Masters to just use their ways of practicing the American Rite[60] (Kentucky work, Virginia Work etc...), which would make it difficult for officers as they had to re-learn a new ways each year.

---

[55] Masonic Code Of The Grand Lodge Of Free And Accepted Masons Of The State Of Nevada Publication date: 2012. p. D17 — Decision Number 119

[56] Grand Lodge of Nevada Proceedings of 1892 Publication Date: 1892 pp.134 -139

[57] The history of Nevada by Davis, Sam P. (Sam Post), 1850-1918 Volume 2 Publication date: 1913 p. 680 — Grand Lodge (Blue Lodge) table of annual sessions & Grand Masters.

[58] Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Colorado of the Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons Publication Date: 1861 p.132

[59] Masonic Code Of The Grand Lodge Of Free And Accepted Masons Of The State Of Nevada Publication date: 2012. pp. D17, D18 — Decision Number 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128.

[60] American Rite also York Rite or Preston-Webb Rite.

The Official Nevada Work was finally adopted in 1910 with an exemption for Carson Lodge Number 1, that had been using their own ritual for the past 48 years at that point,[61] that exemption was revoked the following year when Carson Lodge voluntarily renounced their exemption after complaints from other Lodges.[62]

Bell's strict adherence to rules is evident in his handling of a request from the Grand Master of Utah to reinstate a deceased brother, lacking the ability to verify the facts, his response—sent by telegraph—was unequivocal: "I cannot act". This demonstrates his commitment to due process over emotional appeals.

Bell also made extensive use of the telegraph to communicate with other Lodges or even other jurisdictions of the time, as reflected by his Grand Masters' address showcasing his deep rooted passion for state-of-the-art technologies.

Bell remained an active member of his Lodges and the community after his term as Grand Master until his shortly before his death in 1927, when he had to travel to Oakland, California to be cared for at his daughter's home.

Elder Statesman: Final Service and Legacy (1896-1927)

After his term has Reno's Justice of Peace concluded in 1909, by this time he was regarded as a pillar of the community and highly respected within his community he then retired from public life.

He lived to see the world transformed by the technologies he had helped pioneer in a state he had help form and govern. His wife of over 50 years, Mary Poore Bell, died in 1925 at their daughter Fernald's home in Oakland, California. Beginning that year, Bell adopted a new routine, spending the winters in Oakland with his daughter and the remainder of the year in Reno. [63] Frank Jardine Bell died two years later, on February 13, 1927, also at his daughter's home in Oakland. He was 87 years old.

As requested on his last will and testament his body was returned to his dear city of Reno, the city he had helped to build, for his final resting place.

Bell requested that a Masonic funeral be carried out and that he be buried in the Reno Masonic Memorial Gardens, his familial tomb can still be found today, it is a tall, gray-granite family monument in a late-Victorian style. A square column with chamfered edges on a two-step plinth, topped by a four-gabled, pyramidal cap that reads almost like a small lantern or Gothic roof. The face has a large panel and reads;

"*FRANK BELL JR BORN IN RENO 01-29-1878 DIED 10-20-1879*" the middle clearly reads "*FRANK BELL 1840—1927.*" and the lower parts reads "*MARY POOR BELL 1849 — 1925*".

(Figure 10)

Shortly after his death, in a twist of irony, this man, who had spent his entire life in fraternities, would have his home sold to the Gamma Phi Beta sorority.[64]

---

[61] Grand Lodge of Nevada Proceedings of 1910 Publication Date: 1910 pp.177-178
[62] Grand Lodge of Nevada Proceedings of 1911 Publication Date: 1911 pp.277
[63] Reno Evening Gazette Newspaper Archives October 31, 1925 Page 1
[64] Reno Evening Gazette Newspaper Archives August 24, 1927 Page 4

Bibliography

- Paher, Stanley W. Nevada Ghost Towns & Mining Camps. Las Vegas: Nevada Publications, 1970.
- Bowers, Michael W. The Sagebrush State: Nevada's History, Government, and Politics. 4th ed. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2013.
- Elliott, Russell R., and William D. Rowley. History of Nevada. 2nd ed. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987.
- History of Nevada Far Western frontier, by: Angel, Myron, ed. Publication date: 1881.
- Stein, Mark (2008). How the States Got Their Shapes. Harper Collins
- History of Nevada, Colorado, and Wyoming, 1540-1888 by Bancroft, Hubert Howe. Publication date 1890
- The silver state: Nevada's heritage reinterpreted by Hulse, James W Publication date 1991
- Newspaper – Nevada State Journal in Reno, Nevada. Publication date 19 Feb 1878.
- Pacific Telephone Magazine – Volume 15
- The history of Nevada by Davis, Sam P. (Sam Post), 1850-1918 Volume 2 Publication date: 1913
- Reno Lodge Number Thirteen F. & A.M. 100th — Anniversary Publication Date: 1969
- Proceedings Of The M∴ E∴ Grand Royal Arch Chapter Of The State Of Nevada — Thirty-Second Annual Grand Convocation, Masonic Hall, Carson City Publication date: June 12, A∴D∴ 1905 • A∴I∴ 2435
- Masonic Code Of The Grand Lodge Of Free And Accepted Masons Of The State Of Nevada Publication date: 2012.
- Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Colorado of the Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons. Publication date 1891
- Appendix to the Journals of the Senate and Assembly of the Fifteenth Session of the Legislature of the State of Nevada — "Governor's Message." Publication date 1891
- Proceedings Of The Seventeenth to Twenty-Sixth Triennial Convocation Of The General Grand Chapter Of Royal Arch Masons,Of The United States Of America. Publication date 1859 – 1886
- American Imprints Inventory - The Historical Records Survey Division of Women's and Professional Projects Works Progress Administration No. 7. A Check List of Nevada Imprints1859-1890. Publication date 1939
- The Nevada Adventure - A History By James W. Hulse · Publication date 1972.
- Proceedings Of The Grand Lodge Of Kentucky, F∴And A∴M∴ Ninety-Third annual communication held In: Louisville, Kentucky. Commencing October 18 And 19, 1892. Publication date 1892.
- History of NevadaWith Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers. Publication date:1958
- Journals of Senate And Assembly of the fifteenth of the Session legislature Of The State Of Nevada, Carson, Publication date:1891
- Weekly Reno Gazette
- Weekly Nevada State Journal
- Nevada State Journal
- Reno Weekly Gazette and Stockman
- Daily Nevada State Journal
- "Bell-Poor-in Reno July 2, Frank Bell to Mary Peroes Poor." Nevada State Journal [Reno] 6 July 1872, sec: The Alter: 3. Print.
- "Ayres-Poor-in Reno, July 2, Irvin Ayres to Anna Poor." Nevada State Journal [Reno] 6 July 1872, sec: The Alter. 3. Print.
- "Bell-in Reno July 8 to the wife of Frank Bell, a daughter." Nevada State Journal [Reno] 9 July 1873. Sec. The Cradle: 3. Print.
- "Very Sick." Daily Nevada State Journal [Reno] 19 Oct. 1879:2. Print.
- Nylen, Robert A., and Guy Louis Rocha. "Mary (Poor) Bell." State of Nevada: The Historical Governor's Mansion. Carson City, Nevada: Dema Guinn, the Nevada Commission on Tourism, Nevada Magazine, and the Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs, 2005:27. Print.

Webography

- https://nevadamagazine.com/issue/march-april-2014/1281/
- https://www.britannica.com/place/Nevada-state/History
- https://lasvegassun.com/news/2000/jan/03/nevadas-20th-century-economy-a-tale-of-water-minin/
- https://www.nga.org/governor/charles-clark-stevenson/
- https://www.nga.org/governor/frank-jardine-bell/
- https://nevadamagazine.com/issue/march-april-2014/1281/
- https://www.nga.org/governor/charles-clark-stevenson/
- https://www.leg.state.nv.us/Division/Research/Library/Documents/HistDocs/SoS/
- leg.state.nv.us/assembly/Journals/1893 16th Session Journal of the Nevada State Assembly.pdf
- https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/history/history-nevada

Images

Figure 1: A portrait of Francis J. Bell in his later years. This image is sourced from the 1914 *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Nevada.*

Figure 2: An 1828 map showing Upper and Lower Canada. Bell was born in Toronto, Upper Canada, which was a province of a British colony at the time of his birth in 1840. This map illustrates the region he left behind to seek his fortune on the American western frontier.

Figure 3: A rare portrait of Francis J. Bell at approximately 18 years of age. This photograph captures his appearance around the time he arrived in what was then called the "Washoe" region to begin his pioneering work on the transcontinental telegraph line.

Figure 4: The historical marker in Virginia City commemorating Frank Bell's contributions. The plaque credits him as the builder of the first telegraph lines across the Sierra Nevada and notes his critical role in telegraphing the Nevada constitution to Washington D.C., which secured statehood in 1864.

Figure 5: Areal photograph of Reno, from 1920, looking east over South Virginia Street and the Truckee River. Bell’s house and the old Grand Lodge building are marked.

Figure 6: Earliest bird eye view of the City of Reno as it appeared in the 1890’s still a small community of around 3000. By Powning, C. C. (Christopher C.) for H.S. Crocker & Co.

Figure 7: A colorized photograph of the Reno Mercantile building, which housed Masonic Lodge No. 13 on its upper floor. Located on Commercial Row, this was the Lodge's home from 1872 until 1906 and was the oldest standing commercial structure in Reno until its demolition in 2019.

Figure 8: A colorized version of Masonic Temple on Virginia Street from 1910. (The temple was completed in 1906.)

Figure 9: A colorized version of the only known photograph of the main Lodge room, known as "*The Blue Room,*" in the new Masonic Temple on Virginia Street, which was completed in 1906. As an active member, Frank Bell would have attended meetings in this state-of-the-art facility, which also served as the meeting place for the Grand Lodge of Nevada.

Figure 10: An artist’s depiction of the Frank Bell’s familial tomb.

Appendix

Appendix 1 – Transcription of Frank Bell's address to the Grand Lodge of Nevada.

"Brethren of the Grand Lodge of Nevada:

Another year, fraught with good and evil, has swiftly passed away. Upon our meeting at this, the Twenty-eighth Annual Communication of this Grand Lodge of F∴ and A∴ Masons of Nevada, it is with sincere pleasure that I extend to you a most hearty and fraternal greeting.

Having laid aside the cares of business for a time and met to consult as to matters which affect the welfare of the Craft, I am aware many of you are present at a sacrifice to your business interests, and anxious to perform the duties you are here to attend to and again return to your homes and families. I will, therefore, be as explicit as possible, not unnecessarily to detain you.

One year ago you honored me with the highest position which a Mason can occupy. I now stand before you to render an account of my stewardship for your approval or rejection.

Before doing so, however, permit me to call your attention to the memory of those who have gone before to their eternal rest. In our own Jurisdiction, we are called upon to mourn the loss of twenty-eight Brothers, many of them active workers and zealous Masons.

In our sister Jurisdictions the Great Reaper has been unusually active, notably: Brother SIR EDWAYD KINAHAN, our Representative near the Grand Lodge of Ireland; Past Grand Masters WEBB and LATROBE, of Maryland; HIRAM BASSETT, of Kentucky; BONNER, of Texas; MCFARLAND and TURNER, of Missouri; JOHN ANDERSON, of Montana; Grand Secretaries IRRA BERRY, of Maine; ALEX. G. ABELL, of California; WILL S. HAYES, of Delaware; with many others prominent in Masonry, who have lived respected and died regretted, leaving with us pleasant remembrances, and no words of mine are adequate to express the loss the Fraternity has sustained.

On December 30, 1891, I received the following telegram:

SALT LAKE CITY, Utah, December 30th.
Frank Bell, Grand Master of Masons, Reno:
"JOHN L. ROBERTSON, thirty-four years a Mason, reported suspended at last meeting White Pine, No. 14, died here last night. His family had attempted to pay his arrears and supposed it done. He and they had no knowledge of his suspension. He especially desired Masonic burial. If you restore him by edict wire me and will bury him Masonically."
[Signed]: W. G VAN HORN, Grand Master.

There being no telegraphic communications with White Pine, I was unable to obtain any information in the matter, and was compelled to telegraph as follows:

RENO, Nevada, December 30th.
W. G. Van Horn, Grand Master of Masons, Salt Lake City, Utah:
"I regret that statement of fact and inability to hear from White Pine. I cannot act."
FRANK BELL, Grand Master.

I am pleased to say I have heard of no infringement of our Jurisdiction during the year.

Regarding the case of Brother James Sampson, against whom Mt. Moriah Lodge No. 2 was directed to prefer charges by the M∴W∴ Grand Lodge of Utah, and R. W. Grand Secretary Christopher Diehl directed to communicate to this Grand Lodge the result, the following letter was received after closing of our Grand Lodge in 1891:

> *Salt Lake City, Utah, June 11, 1891.*
> *C. N. Noteware, Grand Secretary, A. F. and A. M., Carson City, Nevada:*
> *R. W. Sir and Dear Brother:—In accordance with a resolution passed at the Twentieth Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of A. F. and A. M. of Utah, held January 20 and 21, 1891, it becomes my duty to inform the M∴W∴ Grand Lodge of Nevada that at a meeting of Mt. Moriah Lodge, No. 2, A. F. and A. M., held June 8, 1891, James Sampson, against whom charges had been preferred in said Lodge for making false statements as to his residence, was found guilty of the offense and suspended from all rights and privileges of Free-Masonry.*
> *Fraternally yours,*
> *Christopher Diehl, Grand Secretary.*

I observe by the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Utah, January 20, 1892, that this action of Mt. Moriah Lodge was sustained; and the same committee, reporting upon the petition of Mt. Moriah Lodge, recommended that said James Sampson be restored to all the rights and privileges of Masonry, which recommendation was adopted.

I beg leave to call your attention to the following communication from the M∴W∴ Grand Master of Ohio, for such action as in your judgment may be required:

> *Office of the Grand Master of Free and Accepted Masons, State of Ohio*
> *Cincinnati, Ohio, August 10, 1891*
> *To the M∴W∴ Grand Lodges of Free and Accepted Masons throughout the world:*
> *Greeting: To the end that the fraternal intercourse and recognition that has heretofore existed between the M∴W∴ Grand Lodge of Ohio and other M∴W∴ Grand Lodges of Free and Accepted Masons throughout the world may continue without misunderstanding, I deem it my duty to call your attention to the fact that representatives from three or four extinct Lodges in this Jurisdiction, whose charters were forfeited by the Grand Lodge of Ohio because of their disloyalty and rebellion, have pretended to organize and set up at Worthington, in the State of Ohio, a so-called Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, in violation of the Landmarks of the Order and of their duty as Masons, and in opposition to the M∴W∴ Grand Lodge which has been in existence in this State for over eighty years.*
> *Were it not that this rebellious faction might attempt to mislead and impose upon the Craft in other Jurisdictions, it would be too insignificant for official attention.*

Yours fraternally,
J. H. Bromwell, Grand Master.
Levi C. Goodale, Grand Secretary.

This difficulty has arisen from the introduction of Cerneau Scottish Rite degrees, which seem to be productive of discord, disturbing the peace and harmony of the Craft in a number of Jurisdictions.

I would also call your attention to a circular from J. J. Audain, Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Hayti, asking for recognition from this Grand Lodge.

The Grand Lodge of Kentucky has forwarded to the Grand Secretary a resolution adopted at its Ninety-second Communication calling for a Fraternal Congress, to meet at Chicago some time during the continuance of the Columbian Exposition. This is similar to a resolution introduced by Past Grand Master Bailey in this Grand Lodge in 1873 to meet in Fraternal Congress at Philadelphia in 1876. As this Congress will be for the interchange of fraternal sentiments only, I recommend that some action be taken at this session, at least to appoint delegates, etc.

R. W. Brother Noteware suggests some action as to uniformity of work.

No doubt this is imperatively necessary, as it is no exaggeration to say that no two Lodges have the same ritual. The differences may not be radical; nevertheless there is great lack of uniformity. We hear of "this work" and "that work," the "old work" and the "new work," all differing more or less, and an effort should certainly be made to remedy this matter. Owing to our financial condition, a Grand Lecturer is out of the question. We have many bright and efficient Brothers, well versed in the ritual, who, I feel satisfied, would willingly assist in remedying this. I would offer, as a suggestion, that a committee of three on work be appointed, who shall exemplify the work in the several degrees at each session of the Grand Lodge; then in a short time we might arrive at least nearer to uniformity than at present; and, unless some action is taken, we must certainly drift further and further apart.

As required by the Constitution, immediately after adjournment of the Grand Lodge, Brother Noteware, Grand Secretary, deposited with me a satisfactory bond in the penal sum of $2,000 for the faithful performance of his duties.

The returns from constituent Lodges are not as satisfactory as we hoped they would be. We have conferred more degrees; the reinstatements are more; dimissions less; and receipts into the Treasury greater than last year. The death rate has been unusually heavy with us, and, owing to business depression throughout the State—mines shut down and no employment to be obtained—the number of suspensions for non-payment of dues has been greater than for several years.

Decisions

1st. *A Lodge being unable to install officers-elect until the day after the anniversary of St. John the Evangelist does not require a dispensation for that purpose.*

2nd. *The finding of a commission to try a Brother—"that he be expelled from membership in his Lodge"—expels him from the Fraternity.*

3rd. *A Brother raised to the Third Degree in a Lodge is a member thereof, although not having signed the By-Laws.*

4th. There is no objection to a Brother who has taken the first section of a degree being present when the same section is conferred upon another candidate.

5th. *When the W. M. is absent the S. W. is acting Master, but the J. W. does not go to the West.*

6th. *Commissioners to try a Brother must be members of the Lodge.*

7th. *Habitual intemperance is a Masonic offense.*

8th. *A Lodge cannot refuse to grant a dimit to a Brother who is clear upon the books and no charges preferred, but the dimit need not be recommendatory.*

9th. *After charges are regularly preferred, the Brother presenting the same can only withdraw them by consent of the Lodge.*

10th. *A dimitted Brother leaving the State before charges are preferred against him—the Lodge loses jurisdiction over him.*

11th. *A paper intended to prefer charges against a Brother is the property of the Brother signing the same until formally presented to the Lodge.*

12th. *A non-affiliate who restores himself by affiliation should pay six months' dues.*

By-Laws Amendments Approved

July 28, 1891 — Eureka Lodge No. 16: dues placed at $1.00/month.

February 27, 1892 — Carson Lodge No. 1: dues reduced to $0.50/month.

Commissions Issued to Representatives Near Other Grand Jurisdictions

October 23, 1891 — W. John H. Scriven, near South Dakota.

November 6, 1891 — W. Nathaniel Grace, near New Zealand.

In conclusion, I desire to express my thanks for the honor conferred upon me; also to Brother Grand Secretary and each and every Grand Officer who has so willingly aided and assisted when called upon. With best wishes for a successful Communication of this Grand Lodge and its future prosperity, I am fraternally yours,

Frank Bell
Grand Master.

Appendix 2 — Frank Bell's Funeral Report (1927) - Reno Evening Gazette Newspaper, February 15, 1927 Page 8.

GOV. FRANK BELL
FUNERAL RITES
ARE LARGELY
ATTENDED

—

High Masons of State Pay
Tribute to Honored Past
Grand Master

—

V. M. Henderson Officiates
For Lodge and Judge
Moran Gives Eulogy

—

CARSON, Feb. 15.—(Special).—While funeral services were being held in Reno for Gov. Frank Bell, the assembly and senate of the Nevada legislature went into joint session this afternoon and held brief services in respect to his memory. Lieut. Gov. Morley Griswold, Assemblyman Walter Kennedy of Washoe and Assemblyman Neil McGill of White Pine county eulogized the pioneer governor with brief addresses.

Simple but deeply impressive funeral rites were held in the Masonic temple this afternoon for Frank Bell, once governor of the state.

Numerous friends of the man who had seen life in Nevada for more than six decades gathered to pay their tribute to his memory. The floral tributes were beautiful and among the set pieces was a square and compasses from Reno lodge No. 13, F. & A. M., of which he was past master; a large keystone design of carnations, heather and maiden hair fern, from Reno chapter Royal Arch Masons of which he was past high priest; a pillow of carnations and a number of sprays, one of which was of deep pink carnations and Scotch heather from the Nevada grand lodge of Masons, of which he was past grand master.

There were a goodly number of sprays from friends, mostly carnations and heather, two of the favorite blooms of the veteran governor.

The Masonic grand lodge opened for the service of its past grand master, V. M. Henderson, deputy grand master officiating in place of W. H. Churchyard, grand master of Yerington, who was unable to be present.

Members of the order with which Mr. Bell was so long identified were present in large numbers for the service. The funeral service began at two o'clock, the eulogy being given by Judge Thomas F. Moran, a close personal friend of ex-Governor Bell, who gave a résumé of

his civic, political and Masonic history. Through special request, Mrs. Chaska West, Loren Pease and Laurie Layman sang two hymns.

Judge Moran, in paying a tribute to his almost life-long friend, said in part:

"*Frank Bell was a natural leader of men and affairs, having been educated in the school of experience. He was always a good, clean, upright citizen; a good, kind hearted neighbor; a competent faithful public servant, who upheld that which was right and condemned that which was wrong. He was a loyal leader in the Masonic fraternity. Always a loyal supporter of his friends and a forgiver of those who were not his friends. He always greeted everybody with a peaceful, calm natural smile*.

"*I remember when Frank Bell's dear wife was buried here in Reno about a year and four months ago. I happened to be one of the pall bearers, and I heard our dear brother say: 'Just think of it we had been together over fifty years, my good wife and I, and no unkind word was passed between us.' One needs no further testimony of the happiness of his home life.*"

He closed by stating that Mrs. Bell was waiting on the other side again to be by her husband's side as soon as the life chord here was broken, that he had entered into God's bark, that the sails were set, the sea was calm and peaceful and that those who so entered the kingdom would enjoy eternal life.

Burial took place in the Masonic cemetery and a long cortege accompanied the remains there, where the last rites of the order with which he was so long associated, were performed.